

Friday, May 16, 2008

Board Members Meet to Discuss 2006 Norfolk Southern Derailment

In a Board Meeting on May 13, the National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the derailment of a Norfolk Southern Railroad Company train was the railroad's inadequate rail inspection and maintenance program that resulted in a rail fracture from an undetected internal defect. Contributing to the accident was the Federal Railroad Administration's inadequate oversight of the internal rail inspection process and its insufficient requirements for internal rail inspection.

On Friday, October 20, 2006, a Norfolk Southern freight train (68QB119), en route from the Chicago, Illinois area to Sewaren, New Jersey, derailed while crossing the Beaver River railroad bridge in New Brighton, Pennsylvania. The train consisted of a three-unit locomotive pulling three empty freight cars and 83 tank cars loaded with 660,952 gallons of denatured ethanol. Twenty-three of the tank cars derailed. Several of the cars fell into the Beaver River. Approximately 20 of the cars released ethanol, a flammable liquid that ignited and burned for 48 hours. A seven-block area of New Brighton was evacuated. There were no injuries or fatalities.

The track where the derailment occurred was installed in 1977 and had experienced significant rail head wear prior to the accident. Norfolk Southern had hired a contractor to inspect the track for internal rail defects. In 2006, three ultrasonic/induction inspections for internal rail defects were conducted on the accident track. The last inspection on August 1, showed an intermittent loss of bottom signal over a 9-foot length of rail in the area where the derailment subsequently occurred.

FRA regulations require that all railroads conduct a continuous search when inspecting rail for internal defects. Additionally, according to the FRA, any rail inspection that is interrupted, as a result of rail surface conditions that inhibit the transmission or return of the signal, is not considered to be continuous and therefore is not considered a valid inspection of the affected rail segment.

However, about a year and a half before the accident and without consulting the FRA, Norfolk Southern gave new procedures to the inspection contractor for inspecting rail for internal defects. The procedures permitted inspection equipment operators to ignore any loss of bottom signal, as long as the continuous loss of signal distance did not exceed 5 feet of linear rail. The Safety Board investigation found that the initiating defect that caused the rail fracture was located in the length of rail that had the loss of bottom signal during the August 1 inspection. The equipment operator did not stop the inspection vehicle for a re-inspection or to hand inspect the rail, consistent with the procedures provided by Norfolk Southern.

As a result of this accident, recommendations were issued to the Federal Railroad Administration, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, and Norfolk Southern dealing with improving internal rail defect detection and other maintenance issues.

Chairman Rosenker Receives Safe Boating Awards

Chairman Mark V. Rosenker received the 2008 Confluence Award, as well as a National Safe Boating Council framed Gold Burgee, on Tuesday, May 13, at the annual Congressional Reception. The award recognizes members of congress and other federal agencies who have aided in the bringing together of people, resources, and vision toward the betterment of safer boating. Chairman Rosenker was given this award for his continuing service to recreational boating safety. The awards ceremony was held at the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, DC. This was the second time the Chairman was the recipient of a Confluence Award.



Chairman Rosenker receiving the Gold Burgee

Chairman Rosenker Recognizes Safety Achievements in the Rail Industry



Chairman Mark Rosenker was the keynote speaker on May 14th at the E. H. Harriman and Harold F. Hammond Memorial Safety Awards luncheon in Washington, D.C. The awards recognize the railroads for attaining the best and the most improved employee safety records during the preceding year and serve as a stimulus for continued improvements within the industry. Several railroads were given gold, silver and bronze awards in various categories for their positive safety performance. The Hammond Award is presented to an individual railroad employee for outstanding safety achievements during the past year. This year's Hammond Award winner was Mr. James "J.T." Wilson, a conductor with CSX Transportation. Mr. Wilson has been an employee with the railroad for more than three decades and as Command Sergeant Major was named South Carolina Guardsman of the Year. In his remarks, Chairman Rosenker urged the continued development of new technologies, such as positive train control and intelligent transportation systems, and the cooperative efforts of the railroads and employees to improve safety even further.

Vice Chairman Sumwalt Addresses Boating Safety Summit

Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt addressed the 400 attendees of the 13th International Boating and Water Safety Summit (IBWSS) held at the Sheraton Hotel and Marina in San Diego, California on April 17, 2008. The Vice Chairman stressed that over 700 boaters die each year on our Nation's waterways and that two major safety failures account for these deaths: the failure to wear life jackets and the lack by operators of recreational boats to complete boater safety education. He applauded the advances that the States have made in accomplishing the mandatory wear of life jackets by children, and indicated that we must change the culture of recreational boating, so that every boater routinely wears a life jacket. He also noted that nearly 80 percent of boaters involved in fatal accidents had not completed a basic boating safety education course, despite evidence from boating safety education initiatives in Connecticut and Alabama indicating that fatalities have been greatly reduced. In conclusion, Vice Chairman Sumwalt challenged conference attendees to join with the Safety Board to motivate the remaining States to enact legislation for mandatory boater education and to require children to wear life jackets every time they are on a boat.



Member Hersman Addresses Corporate Aviation Safety Seminar

Member Debbie Hersman addressed more than 400 people involved in corporate aviation at the Flight Safety Foundation's 53rd Annual Corporate Aviation Safety Seminar held in Palm Harbour, FL. on May 1. Her presentation covered accidents involving overruns on contaminated runways and ongoing investigations of corporate aircraft accidents. Jeff Guzzetti and Bob Gretz helped prepare the presentation. Guzzetti and Mike Huhn accompanied Member Hersman to the seminar.

